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## **Book Reviews - Energy humanities: an anthology**

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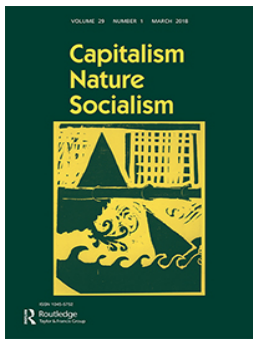
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## Energy Humanities: An Anthology

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are his words. From the isolation of Imrali Island, he has no ability to direct the minds and actions of this supposed cult. Having spent some time myself in the midst of those yellow flags in outposts of this solidarity movement, I am clear that the flags of Öcalan represent freedom to the bearers, not just for him, but for everyone and, especially, for women.

*Liberating Life* concludes with Öcalan's optimism that the 21st century shall be the century of women's liberation. Necessarily, that also means the overthrow of the state and capitalism and their replacement with his vision for political society engaged in democratic confederalism and an ecological communal economy. He writes that he wishes to assist with this development of humanity, not only through writing but also by helping to implement the changes. I wish it to be so. His imprisonment, total isolation, and lack of access to lawyers is an extreme contravention of human rights, and unsurprising given the threat that his ideas pose to the Turkish state, the region, and, perhaps even to capitalist modernity and its dominant war machine. Freedom for Öcalan! Jin, Jiyan, Azadi!

The worldwide movement for freedom for Öcalan from the Guantanamo of Europe is gathering energy from the revolution and from increasing concern for Öcalan's life in light of the absence of any direct contact with him since April 2015. Please add your voice for his freedom at <http://www.freeocalan.org/>.

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**Energy Humanities: An Anthology**, edited by Imre Szeman and Dominic Boyer, Baltimore, MD, John Hopkins University Press, 2017, 616 pages, \$49.95 (paperback), ISBN: 9781421421896

This anthology makes an intriguing and productive contribution to the dynamic field of environmental humanities. The editors are Canada Research Chair in Cultural Studies and Professor of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta, and Professor of Anthropology and Director of the Centre for Energy and Environmental Research in the Human Sciences at Rice University. It brings together a diverse range of work. Spanning eight decades and numerous genres, the pieces all attend to the social, cultural and political challenges posed by humanity's "use and abuse of energy" (1).

The texts include excerpts from articles, books (fiction and non-fiction), poems, short stories, plays, policy analysis and Pope Francis's Encyclical. The majority were written in the last 10 years, with notable exceptions including Pablo Neruda's 1940 poem "Standard Oil Co." (80–82) and Ken Saro-Wiwa's short story "Night Ride" (310–316) written in 1995. Indeed, all the pre-20th-

century pieces in this anthology are creative work, which will come as no surprise to those who recognize that, “it is in art that society finds its long horizons, its sweep of ages ... [its] far-seers” (Griffiths 2010, 6)

Thus, beyond making a critical case for the “strong equation of energy and modernity” (1), this book vibrantly demonstrates the productivity of interdisciplinary friction. By meaningfully transcending classic analysis of the current globalized energy models, it seeks creative solutions to the most dramatic environmental dilemma of the era. For, as pointed out by the editors,

there is a place for sober criticism and discussion in the enterprise of energy humanities; there is also a place for surreal vision and wild imagination. It will take all the capacities of the arts and humanities to help transform this modernity. (9)

*Energy Humanities* is divided into four sections. The first, entitled “History and Modernity: Histories and Futures” begins with three important texts that make critical analyses of the global situation of the Anthropocene, connecting oil capital, geopolitics, electricity and the everyday uses of energy with climate change, environmental degradation and social transformations. Szeman’s essay (55–70) is particularly useful in distinguishing and analysing the different discourses amidst this oil disaster, namely strategic realism, techno-utopianism and apocalyptic environmentalism. Pointing out the limits and the strengths of these discourses provides elements for the complex task of re-imagining and crafting a new political economy. Similarly, Sheer’s paper (97–107) dissects how an economy structured around primary production, industrial farming and GDP growth is unsustainable and calls for a global solar economy where the national state would have a pivotal role. The poems, climate fiction and short stories that follow are useful to grasp the current fossil society we live in as well as speculatively engaging with energy futures.

Section two, “Energy, Power, and Politics” is a series of texts that examine the interrelationships of political structures and energy with a particular focus on oil. Timothy Mitchell’s “Carbon Democracy” (157–183) is a mandatory text for understanding the history of the global use of coal and the shift to oil, indicating that current social democracy developed thanks to this new source of energy which seemed to promise a future of limitless growth. The essays of Jean-François Mouhot (205–219) and Michael Watts (219–235) remind us that our current economic dependence on fossil fuels has colonial roots and demonstrate how the thriving of oil requires uneven geographical and social development. By applying a feminist lens on petro-discourses, Sheena Wilson’s piece (269–284) is central for understanding how “the histories of feminism and oil are intertwined” (273).

The third section, “Energy in Philosophy: Ethics, Politics and Being,” brings together works that call for energy to hold greater significance in philosophical thought, and recognize that achieving this requires the reimagination of many fundamental concepts and understandings. Masco’s mind-bending piece, “Atomic Health, or How the Bomb Altered American Notions of Death” (339–352) describes how the events of 1945 revolutionized American society by placing “national security” in direct opposition with “public health.” Scranton’s

(384–388) article also dwells on death. Linking his experiences on tour with the U.S. Army in Iraq with that of the Anthropocene, he suggests that “learn[ing] how to die not as individuals, but as a civilization” (387) might offer us a new way of being in the world. In “The Draukie’s Tale” (352–357), poet Laura Watts gives an alternative account of the power of the waves, one which goes beyond the limits of scientific data; Karen Pinkus’s “Air” (414–422), an extract from her 2016 book *Fuel: A Speculative Dictionary*, takes a similarly creative approach to conceiving energy. “Air” is also notable for featuring two of the too few pieces of visual material to be found in *Energy Humanities*. The others, a short series of photographs and a collection of “post-energy” posters, bookend the anthology.


“The Aesthetics of Petrocultures” is the title of the anthology’s final section and contains work that has begun to seriously engage with the influence of changes in energy systems on aesthetics and culture. Yaeger (440–445) and Lord (520–529), taking up the thread sewn by Ghosh in his seminal 1992 “Petrofiction” essay (431–440), consider the fact that the material and social impacts of energy are all but absent from discussion of the development of literature, visual arts and architecture. Meanwhile Wenzel (486–504), in her introduction of the concept *petro-magic-realism* in Nigerian literature, presents an exciting new direction for literary criticism that “offers a way of understanding the relationships between the fantastic and material elements of these stories, linking formal, intertextual, sociological, and economic questions about literature to questions of political ecology” (487). The excerpt from Abdul Rahman Munif’s epic novel, *Cities of Salt* (1988) (445–454), offers a literary example of the transformational impact of “the oil encounter” in the Arabian Peninsula—just one of many that are still to be told.

*Energy Humanities* is an ambitious and stimulating collection that will assist the reader in understanding the importance of explicitly engaging with energy across the arts, humanities and social sciences. It is equally suited for undergraduate students and advanced academics who are interested in exploring the fecundity of interdisciplinary discussion and creative critique.

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